

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 2726

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BL
SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN ELECTIONS: BANZER AND THE ARMED FORCES

1. TWO CONVERSATIONS I HAVE HAD IN THE LAST 24 HOURS INDICATE THE TENSIONS INVOLVED IN THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES CONTINUING MARATHON MEETING ON THE FUTURE COURSE OF BOLIVIA'S DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS.

2. LAST NIGHT BANZER CONFIDANT MARIO MERCADO BUTTONHOLDED ME TO RELAY HIS APRIL 1 CONVERSATION WITH BANZER. MERCADO TOLD ME HE HAD REPORTED TO BANZER IN DETAIL MY COMMENTS ON US AID PROSPECTS AND TIN POLICY AS THEY RELATE TO OUR SUPPORT FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. IN THE END, MERCADO SAID, BANZER HAD ENDED UP CONVINCING MERCADO (WHO NEEDED NO CONVINCING) THAT ELECTIONS MUST BE POSTPONED BECAUSE THE CAMPAIGN OF THE ONLY VIABLE CANDIDATE, JUAN PEREDA, WAS FATALLY AND SCANDALOUSLY FLAWED. WITH GREAT DRAMATICS MERCADO SAID HE NEEDED TO TELL ME A SECRET THAT ONLY FOUR PEOPLE IN BOLIVIA KNEW: THAT PEREDA WAS NOT CONSTITUTIONALLY ELIGIBLE TO BE PRESIDENT OF BOLIVIA, BECAUSE BANZER HAD RECENTLY DISCOVERED TO HIS HORROR THAT PEREDA WAS BORN IN SANTAGIO, CHILE. JAVIER ARCE HAD BEEN DISPATCHED TO SEE PINOCHET TO GET HIM TO DESTROY THE ENTRIES IN CHILEAN BIRTH REGISTRIES. BUT PINOCHET, CONTINUED MERCADO, WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LA PAZ 02726 042244Z

A COPY SO THAT HE COULD UNDERMINE A PEREDA GOVERNMENT AT ANY MOMENT BY DISCLOSURE OF THIS BOMBSHELL NEWS. SO, MERCADO CONCLUDED, THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOW SEE WHY ELECTIONS HAD TO BE POSTPONED UNTIL OTHER VIABLE CANDIDATES COULD DEVELOP.

3. I BLUNTLY TOLD MERCADO THAT THIS WAS AN EXCITING STORY

BUT IN THIS FORM DISINGENUOUS. AT LEAST BANZER AND PEREDA FOES HAD TOLD ME FOUR MONTHS AGO OF THE RUMORED DUBIOUS NATURE OF PEREDA'S BOLIVIAN BIRTH CERTIFICATE. AND I WAS SURE WHATEVER THEY KNEW THEN, BANZER KNEW THEN. SO WHATEVER THE VALIDITY OF THE FACTS, THEY WERE NOT NEW BUT ONES KNOWN BEFORE BANZER PICKED PEREDA TO RUN AS HIS SUCCESSOR. THEREFORE, THE NOTION THAT THERE WAS HERE A "NEW DEVELOPMENT" THAT WARRANTED POSTPONING ELECTIONS WAS JUST NOT CREDIBLE. MERCADO WAS EXTREMELY ANNOYED WITH MY REACTION TO THIS BANZER BALLOON.

4. THIS MORNING I SPENT OVER AN HOUR WITH ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL VILLALPANDO, WHO LEFT THE ARMED FORCES MARATHON MEETING TO RECEIVE ME. I TOLD VILLALPANDO THAT THE US, AND INDEED MANY FRIENDLY COUNTRIES, WERE WATCHING WITH GREAT INTEREST THE ARMED FORCES DELIBERATION OF BOLIVIA'S POLITICAL FUTURE. WE KNEW THAT THE ARMED FORCES WANTED TO CONCLUDE THEIR YEARS OF GOVERNMENT IN BOLIVIA WITH HONOR AND WITH A SENSE OF HAVING CREATED INSTITUTIONS TO SECURE BOLIVIA'S FUTURE. THE UNITED STATES HAD NO VIEWS ON CANDIDATES OR OTHER INTERNAL BOLIVIAN POLITICAL DECISIONS OTHER THAN OUR SUPPORT FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. TO ASSURE THAT THE ARMED FORCES UNDERSTOOD THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE UNITED STATES COULD SUPPORT THE ECONOMIC BASE FOR EARLY DEMOCRATIZATION, I WANTED TO REVIEW WITH HIM WHAT I HAD SAID TO BANZER LAST THURSDAY--IN CASE BANZER HAD BEEN UNABLE TO RELAY ALL OF THIS TO HIM. (I REVIEW THE SUBSTANCE OF CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LA PAZ 02726 042244Z

MY CONVERSATION WITH BANZER ON AID AND TIN.)

5. VILLALPANDO LISTENED VERY CAREFULLY AND ASKED A LOT OF QUESTIONS, PARTICULARLY ABOUT TIN SALES (HE IS A FORMER MINISTER OF MINES). IT WAS OBVIOUS BANZER HAD NOT FILLED HIM IN ON MY MEETING. VILLALPANDO SAID HE WAS VERY GRATEFUL FOR THE ASSURANCES THAT THE US WOULD HELP DEMOCRATIC BOLIVIA WITH ITS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. HE SAID HE WOULD INFORM SOME KEY MILITARY COMMANDERS OF MY GENERAL REMARKS AND HE WAS SURE THIS WOULD HAVE A SALUTORY EFFECT ON THEIR DELIBERATIONS.

6. AFTER SOME RAMBLING ABOUT COMMUNISTS AND EXTREMISTS, HE SAID THAT HIS IMPRESSION WAS THAT THE ARMED FORCES WERE COALESCING AROUND A CONCLUSION THAT DEMOCRATIZATION HAD TO PROCEED AND THAT A SMOOTH PASSAGE HAD TO BE GUARANTEED BY THE ARMED FORCES THEMSELVES. (HE DID NOT MENTION BANZER IN THE COURSE OF AN HOUR'S CONVERSATION.) VILLALPANDO SAID HE DID NOT KNOW YET WHEN THE ARMED FORCES MEETING WOULD CONCLUDE, BUT HIS HOPE WAS THAT IT WOULD PRODUCE A CLEAR SCHEDULE FOR DEMOCRATIZATION, GUARANTEED BY THE ARMED FORCES, IN WHICH THE COUNTRY AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY COULD HAVE

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7. COMMENT: AS OF APRIL 4, THE SITUATION HERE REMAINS FLUID. BUT I CAN VENTURE A FEW TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS FOR THOSE WHO SEEK CLARITY IN THE OPAQUENESS OF BOLIVIAN POLITICS.

A. THE MOVING FORCE BEHIND THE TURBULENT EVENTS OF THE LAST TEN DAYS HAS BEEN BANZER'S DESIRE TO PERPETUATE HIMSELF.

B. BANZER HIMSELF HAS MOVED TO UNDERMINE PEREDA'S CANDIDACY AT EVERY TURN AND IS NOW, IF NECESSARY, PREPARED TO PULL OUT FROM UNDER PEREDA THE RUG OF THIS LEGAL CLAIM TO BE PRESIDENT--A RUG BANZER PUT UNDER PEREDA FOR CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 LA PAZ 02726 042244Z

JUST SUCH AN EVENTUALITY.

C. BANZER MAY WELL ALREADY HAVE FAILED IN AN EFFORT TO GET QUICK MILITARY SUPPORT FOR HIS CONTINUING AS PRESIDENT UNTIL 1980 (MAYBE) ELECTIONS.

D. BY ONE MORE PRECIPITOUS CHANGE IN COURSE, BANZER HAS AGAIN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED HIS SUPPORT AMONG THE MILITARY, TO THE POINT WHERE THE MILITARY MAY HAVE AS MUCH OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO DETERMINE THE OUTCOME AS DOES BANZER.

E. THE MILITARY NOW HAS A STRONGER INTEREST IN ELECTIONS THAN BANZER.

F. POSTPONEMENT OF JULY ELECTIONS STILL APPEARS VERY LIKELY, BUT THE DURATION OF THAT POSTPONEMENT, THE SHAPE OF THE GOVERNMENT BETWEEN NOW AND ELECTIONS (PARTICULARLY WHETHER BANZER IS IN IT) AND THE POSSIBLE CANDIDATES ARE VERY OPEN QUESTIONS.

G. IF BANZER CANNOT CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT OF A MILITARY GOVERNMENT, HE WILL TRY SOMETHING ELSE (I.E., BANZER AS CANDIDATE IN POSTPONED ELECTIONS).
BOEKER

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